

AGENDA ITEM: Library of California Reference Program

BACKGROUND:

NOTE to Board Members: There is no new content in the Background section of this agenda item.

The CLSA State Reference Centers program has never been funded by the state. That program and services are described in Education Code Sections 18760-18764, and the similar (though not identical) LoC services are described in Education Code Section 18853(a).

The CLSA State Reference Centers program provides for the establishment of two or more statewide reference centers which provide statewide service. It also specifies that one or more of the state reference centers be designated as a "...repository for collections specially relevant to economically disadvantaged and non English-speaking persons."

The LoC program element calls for "access to specialized information expertise and resources statewide to answer information requests generated by its primary clientele that are beyond the capacity or capability of a member institution or public library jurisdiction and its regional library network." It also indicates that "Provision shall be made for information formats specially relevant to culturally diverse populations and persons with disabilities."

As planning for the LoC Reference program begins, the concepts of the unfunded CLSA Reference Centers program are being considered under that broader planning effort in an attempt to frame a cohesive, complete statewide reference services program that would serve Californians through libraries of all types and not continue design of programs fragmented by type of library.

CURRENT STATUS: In accordance with Board direction, the 2001/2002 budget request for Library of California funding did not include any element specifically for the statewide reference components of the Act, pending staff and Board work on further defining those components.

Work does continue, using LSTA funds, to test and refine potential LoC reference services components, as described below.

FIRST SOURCE:

An LSTA grant for 2000/2001 was funded effective October 1, 2000 to continue testing and refinement of this statewide reference services component through the Los Angeles Public Library, which provides access to 200-plus online databases to all CLSA System Reference Centers and, this year, to six individual rural libraries.

Staff at the Los Angeles Public Library (LAPL) have informed CSL staff that they cannot expand access to their currently negotiated online database agreements beyond California public libraries until new agreements with these vendors have been negotiated. Consequently staff have informed the Regional Library Networks that access to First Source databases is not available for reference support through the regional networks to non-public libraries this year, and advised them to develop their plans of service accordingly. Further deliberations regarding negotiation of these expanded licenses will be included in efforts to negotiate statewide licenses in a number of areas.

LAPL has completed an informal evaluation of the effectiveness of the First Source service and that data will be used in developing recommendations to the Board regarding the LoC Reference Program.

VIRTUAL ETHNIC RESOURCE CENTER (VERC)

As described to the Board in detail earlier, the VERC has been mounted on a web site at www.verc.org. It is expected that, if found useful by a large number of libraries, this program could become a part of the Board's efforts to better serve the underserved.

The State Library has used LSTA funding to expand this demonstration project and extend it through September 30, 2001 so that it can continue to develop while Board and staff formally consider the basic components and timing for the LoC Reference Program.

Brochures describing this program have been mailed to all California public libraries, the primary audiences for the service, and initial comments are quite positive. An evaluation form is being mounted on the web to obtain formal assessment of the product by users. This data will be used in developing recommendations to the Board regarding the LoC Reference Program.

REVIEW OF LOC REFERENCE PROGRAM

It was proposed at the August 2000 Board meeting that a formal review of the statewide reference components of these programs be undertaken to provide the Board with recommendations for the future, overall design of them. This review is still in the planning stages and will not show real progress until the Library Programs Consultant position charged with reference and resource libraries program development is able to undertake work on these programs. Plans are beginning to be developed for bringing together the reference coordinators now charged with providing reference services to the regional library networks. At this point, it is staff's intention to bring this group together before mid-September so that a process and direction for review of this program can be drafted.

RELATED ISSUES TO COME BEFORE THE BOARD IN THE FUTURE:

1. Consider report of recommendations on alternative implementations of state reference services under the Library of California Act.
2. Review results of studies and projects now underway, including the pilot project involving System Reference Centers and rural library access to First Source services, the Virtual Ethnic Resource Center, and the Consumer Health Information Service program in Riverside.

Relevant Committee: Access Services
Staff Liaison: Cathie Helmick/Diana Paque